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Volunteers for intelligence—the fringe and farther-out.

CRANKS, NUTS, AND SCREWBALLS

David R. McLean

"I have always had adequate sex that no one appreciated. I need a better grade of iron to eat, and so do the astronauts." (Excerpt from a July 1964 letter to the Director of Central Intelligence.)

"A defenseless woman having husband trouble sincerely requests your help." (June 1964 letter to the DCI, enclosing picture of a convertible and address of a suburban motel.)

"O.K.! Keep me off the payroll. I'll try and sell my abilities to the Soviet Union." (1965 postcard peevishly addressed to the U.S. Lower Intelligence Agency.)

"Please be informed, old pal, I have entered my name with the 87th Congress as a candidate for the Presidency of the United States in the next elections. If I make it, I am going to reinstate you in CIA." (1962 letter to Allen W. Dulles.)

"You can tell John A. McCone to go to hell if you think I'm going to be treated this way after all I've done for you people." (Early morning telephone call from "Agent 44" on his release from the drunk cell of a Washington police precinct.)

"ORNISCOPYTHEOBI BLIOPSYCHOCRYSI ARROSCIOAEROGEN ETHLIOMETEOR OAU STRAHIEROANTHRO VICHTHYOPYROSI DEROCH PNOMYOALE . . ." (Excerpt from a 1963 telegram to CIA.)

Something about a secret intelligence agency attracts an endless stream of letters, cards, telegrams, phone calls, and personal visits from deranged, possibly dangerous, or merely daffy citizens who want to horn in on the cloak-and-dagger act. Mixed into the CIA morning mail, these unsolicited testimonials to the Agency's drawing power create some delicate screening problems, waste a lot of time, and justify elaborate security precautions to protect its top officials.

The Agency's Office of Security keeps a watch list of nearly four thousand persons or organizations who have tried to visit, write, or phone its officials and who have been, at a minimum, a source of annoyance. Every suspected crank contact is checked against this list. The signatures include "The Green Russian" in Charlotte, N.C., and "Your Aunt Minnie" in San Francisco. Nearly all crank letters are domestic, but alongside addresses in Pewee Valley, Ky., and Big Bear City, Cal., are foreign listings from Quito to Warsaw and from Edinburgh to Australia.

Steadies and One-Timers

The flow of oddball letters and phone calls increases perceptibly when CIA is in the news. Less than 48 hours after President Johnson announced he would nominate Admiral Raborn to be the DCI, a Detroit man had sent the Director-designate 8,000 words of complaint about the high cost of prescription medicines and a New Yorker had asked his help in controlling a whistling brain. The file of letters to him was mounting even before his appointment had been confirmed. On 17 April a Massachusetts man sent him some well-intentioned advice. "Dear Admiral," he wrote, "as you may be aware, L.B.J. ain't got much Brains or he wouldn't be President. I dealt with his type for 37 years. The best way to get along with him is humor him."

But a faithful nucleus of loyal intelligence fans always contributes about 25 percent of the total. Probably most of the cranks are as harmless as the childish codes they sometimes use. The trouble is, they're unpredictable. A few might have complaints worth hearing; others might pose a real threat to an unsuspecting officer who received them.

Nut-and-dolt visits to headquarters offices have practically disappeared since CIA moved out to Langley; an occasional walk-in still calls at its personnel office downtown. Its overt or semi-overt domestic offices, which are more approachable, have now compiled an impressive record of coping with off-beat visitors.

Clairvoyance and Contrivances

A fairly common complaint of the walk-ins is getting messages from the Communists by thought-transference or through the fillings in their teeth. One disturbed gentleman from Buffalo claimed the Communists had kidnapped him, cut open his head, removed his

brains, and substituted a radio. After warning his interviewer to say nothing the opposition should not hear, he asked CIA to remove the radio and replace the brains. For sheer imagination in fielding such a complaint, the prize probably goes to the CIA man who assured a woman she might indeed be getting radio messages by static electricity. Reminding her of the chains that drag under gasoline trucks, he linked a series of paper clips, hooked one end in her skirt, let the other end trail on the floor, and sent her happily on her way with the static safely grounded.

Then there was the man who came in to volunteer as a spy in the Czechoslovakian uranium mines. He confided that he had been stalling because he feared the radiation might make him sterile. Now, however, he had solved this problem: he planned to carry along a carton of Chesterfields and wrap the tinfoil around his private parts. The Agency secretary who transcribed a memorandum on his visit never could understand why he insisted on Chesterfields.

Some fairly far-out ideas have been seriously proposed by sensible citizens. One responsible businessman developed a mechanical chess-playing machine which countered any move according to prepunched IBM cards. He proposed to take his machine to Moscow, consolidate his position there, and then suggest that the machine could be used as a training aid for any move-and-countermove situation, such as military tactics. Instead of chessmen he would use symbols for tanks, infantry, hills, forests, planes, and fields of fire. Since he knew nothing about military tactics, the Soviet general staff would have to tell him the prescribed response to every move. As soon as he had all the responses punched on IBM cards he would deliver duplicates to the American Embassy. Then if we ever faced the USSR in battle we could always run the IBM cards and tell what the Soviets would do next.

The most intriguing case investigated by a domestic office involved a school superintendent of unassailable reliability who dabbled in hypnotism as a hobby and reported that he could induce clairvoyance in his subject, an engineering student. In 1957, while in a hypnotic trance, the subject described in minute technical detail a Soviet ballistic missile of a type unknown in the United States but consistent with expert private assessments of Soviet capabilities. The research chief of a respected American aircraft plant was present at the demonstration, framed many questions, and made a tape recording of the answers. The subject used technical and scientific terminology

which neither he nor the hypnotist could be expected to know. Washington experts who studied the tape found "just enough substantive data to stimulate the imagination" but decided that clairvoyance would be "a very risky approach to the collection of Soviet guided missile data." The mystery remains unsolved.

Other Field Office Walk-ins

Some unlikely sources have produced usable information. In 1959 a soldier of fortune fresh from Cuba wearing yellow canvas shoes, red denim slacks, and a gaudy sport shirt contacted a domestic office. His debriefing was worth while but abbreviated by his arrest for having a bag of dynamite in his hotel room. In October 1964 a Miami man brought to CIA a box which he had bought sight-unseen at an auction of shipments abandoned in U.S. customs. The box contained more than 2,000 negatives of Cuban propaganda. And on 8 July 1960 an admitted swindler and diamond smuggler volunteered the information that five Soviet missile experts had just travelled to Cuba by way of Mexico. This report was taken with a grain of salt at the time.

One probable James Bond fan seems obsessed with finding unusual ways of eliminating the opposition. Besides the usual poisons and trick guns, he has suggested a lethally exploding cigar disguised with a band reading "It's a boy!" He has also offered to dispose of bodies for us in his home meat grinder. An attractive divorcee leads a sober life in this country as an airline secretary but regularly flies to another country and cuts loose there among the political leaders. For all her Mata Hari complex she has brought useful information.

Ever since 1948 a Slovak economist has been trying to peddle information he claims to obtain through a private underground net. He is presentable and persuasive and has impressed countless high officials, including a senator who brought him to lunch with the upper echelons of CIA. Fortunately these official contacts quickly lead back to a burn notice identifying him as a fabricator. As late as 1963, however, he was still trying with some success to interest leading American industries in technical data from anti-Communist researchers behind the iron curtain. Having abandoned the atomic cannon he offered the government, he was tempting industry with everything from synthetic fibers to jet engine designs, high-temperature ceramics, and flexible concrete. Meanwhile he had hired a lawyer

and sued a Washington shoe store for $25,000 because his shoes were too tight; in the brief he filed with the court he claimed that as a spy he needed to run fast.

Letters to Langley

By far the greatest number of crank contacts are by mail. In the first eight months of Fiscal Year 1965, 1,143 letters addressed simply to CIA were identified as from cranks. This does not count those addressed otherwise—to the DCI by name or to specific field offices.

Neither does it include some unsolicited letters which may be helpful, pathetic, or merely misguided but are not from cranks. The following examples are all from March 1965: An ex-Marine sent a possibly practical suggestion for guerrilla warfare. A 17-year-old Thai girl asked how to get training in police investigation. A German student asked for help in locating his father, who had been captured by the Soviets in World War II. A 14-year-old boy asked if there were really such organizations as SMERSH and U.N.C.L.E. All such writers receive courteous replies.

But in the same month there arrived elaborate greetings to the DCI from a Maryland woman who thinks she is Catherine III, Empress of all the Russias, and who had previously sent a 5,000-word report on how she insured the successful invasion of Europe by entertaining Hitler privately for 12 hours on D-Day. Also in March 1965 came the advice that "now is the time—at last—to train 100 of the top CIA men to penetrate every possible beauty parlor and Chinese restaurant . . . the results will amaze and constantly astound your organization." On 13 March a New York correspondent informed us that Rudolph Hess, from his cell in Spandau, was controlling ten leading Southern segregationists by long-distance hypnotism. And on 25 March a woman wrote to the Director from Massachusetts: "As near as I can make out there normally is a grey cloud at the base of the psyche. When the cloud backs up you go out of focus. But after taking Alka Seltzer and sodium bicarbonate I can sing Hokus Pokus you're in focus."

A 1964 letter was addressed to "Snuffy McDuffy, Top Floor, Closed Door, CIA, Washington, D.C." Perceptive mail clerks sent it to the Director's office, where it was found to contain a fairly reasonable suggestion for propaganda. The letter ended: "P.S. If you don't take appropriate action I'll write to the President and tell him you're chicken."

The Fox

Probably the most imaginative and persistent correspondent is a gaunt long-faced man with sunken eyes and prominent ears who first wrote to CIA on 27 January 1952 asking for a high-powered rifle with telescopic sights and terrain maps of Siberia, Manchuria, and Korea. Since then he has sent thousands of letters, postcards, and telegrams and used more than 50 aliases ranging from "Alexis Alexandrovich" to "Old Woody, The Fox." Usually he signs his true name followed by "U.S. Code 143," CIA's government tie-line code. Here we shall call him Old Woody.

Even though his handwriting and literary style are well known around the DCI's office, age cannot wither nor custom stale Old Woody's infinite variety. One letter told the Director: "I have allotted you a maximum life span of 94 years, not to exceed the year 1987." Another complained that "someone has wired my head for sight and sound." A third urged the Director to "tell Hoffa to require seat belts in all trucks." A fourth began: "Allen, I regret to inform you Kennedy won the election fair and square." Then came a telegram (collect) from Florida: "REQUEST FEDERAL TROOPS, MARTIAL LAW. MIAMI SITUATION OUT OF CONTROL."

Old Woody travels widely, usually first class. He has written from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Nassau, Honolulu, and Hong Kong, as well as from most major cities in the United States. On domestic airlines and in American hotels he has often registered as "A.W. Dulles, Jr." and mailed cancelled tickets and receipted bills to CIA. He likes luxury hotels; his suite at a Washington hotel in 1960 was billed at $52 a day. On many of his trips he listed CIA's street address as his residence and the DCI as his next-of-kin, often reinforcing the latter claim by taking out $62,500 in flight insurance with the Director as beneficiary.

In October 1964 Old Woody was arrested for vagrancy in Richmond. Allowed only one phone call, he used it to notify CIA of his plight. A couple of weeks later he phoned to report his new motorcycle license, and still later he wrote that he was working on a boat in Miami. Back in the money early in 1965, he wrote from Bermuda that he had been appointed King of the British Empire.

The risk of arrest does not dampen Old Woody's enthusiasm for the service. In August 1960 he made a telephone appointment with the commanding officer of an Air Force base in Nevada, conducted a "CIA security inspection," used the base commander's telephone

to call CIA headquarters in Washington, and on departure warned the commander that some officers were out of uniform at Harold's Club. After sending MP's on a wild goose chase to the gambling club, the base commander somewhat grumpily reported the incident in an official letter to CIA. A few months later Old Woody was not so lucky. In Ponce, Puerto Rico, he represented himself as an FBI agent, borrowed a jeep from the National Guard, and drove it across the island to San Juan, where he was arrested. "Dear Allen," he wrote from jail, "I am in trouble again." A few days later he grew petulant. "You are wasting your time and the Armed Forces' time," he wrote, "I do not intend a reconciliation."

Generous to a fault, Old Woody rented a Cadillac limousine and chauffeur at $100 a day just before Christmas 1960 and drove to the Soviet embassy, where he left $100 for Francis Gary Powers. Then he drove to the Cuban embassy with $100 for prisoners on the Isle of Pines, and then to the American Red Cross, where he contributed $70 to help unmarried mothers. Finally he came to CIA headquarters and handed the receptionist an envelope addressed to Mr. Dulles containing $50 as a Christmas present. These activities landed him in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, from which he escaped a few days later after getting back the $50 from CIA. But he was pleased with the episode; nearly two years later he wrote Mr. Dulles that "some day I'll give you another $50 bill as a token of my affection."

In November 1961 he wrote from El Paso: "When the new Director takes over, I guess I'll wash my hands of CIA." But Old Woody didn't, and the flow of letters continues. In December 1961 he put down CIA as his home address when he opened a bank account in Wilmington, Delaware. In October 1962 he telegraphed from Chicago: "FIDEL CASTRO MINUS HIS BEARD ARRIVED CHICAGO THIS P.M. HAVE DETAIL COVERING HIM." In September 1963 a Washington-Miami airliner turned back and off-loaded him; he had alarmed fellow-passengers by claiming to be a personal friend of Fidel Castro and trying to communicate with CIA by radio.

Is Old Woody just a harmless screwball? In 1960 he wrote: "Allen, I am going to start carrying a regulation FBI revolver and if someone forces me into a situation I intend on using it." In 1961 he warned Mr. Dulles: "The bomb attached to my radio in Room 313 has not availed you anything so far." Who knows what Old Woody will interpret as "a situation"? At a minimum, he has cost the Govern-

ment a great many dollars in wasted time, filing space, analyses, and precautions. As he himself put it in a 1960 letter from West Palm Beach: "Allen, you should deduct me from your income tax."

Fish and a Record

Some crank correspondents are remarkably well educated and successful in business or the arts. Take the 50-year-old daughter of a high-ranking Army officer who now owns a prosperous small-town shop. Educated in Europe and widely travelled, she served abroad with the Red Cross in World War II and has written many successful books—including one which was made into a major motion picture. She writes beautifully and, at first glance, convincingly.

It was the fish that gave her away. Her early letters just asked for information about an inner circle of Government officials who used a drawing of a fish as the symbol of "a confidentially shared community of patriotic attitude." Then she started sending CIA officials postcards with crude drawings of fish. Later she adopted the fish as a signature to her own letters.

In 1962 the fish-woman asked the vice president of a Washington bank to help finance a small private counterespionage organization working to expose "the mammoth traitorous operation at present flourishing within our Government." Meanwhile she wrote threatening anonymous letters, mailed them to herself, and then forwarded them to CIA to prove the existence of a conspiracy. Ignored for years, she continues writing long and quite articulate letters. The most recent one, mailed in March 1965, contains roughly 11,000 words.

One might think that if no one answered their letters the crank correspondents would eventually get discouraged and quit writing. This is not always true. CIA's most faithful correspondent has been plugging a single theme steadily since 1951, when he decided a "CIA agent" had welshed on a job offer. Almost every day he mails a postcard with the same message: "Take Action on CIA Agent Joe Blank!" He has been arrested and released on his promise to stop writing; within a few days the postcards arrive again. He has written from Miami, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Phoenix, Denver, Rochester, Colorado Springs, and Hampton, Va.—hitting his peak in 1962 with a total of 332 postcards to CIA. He has also carried his complaint

to the Secretary of Defense, but a special assistant at the Pentagon politely suggested in reply that he deal directly with CIA.

Violence

Are such cranks actually dangerous? Read on.

On 13 March 1963 a "consulting nuclear engineer" called at CIA's downtown personnel office and tried to see the DCI. File checks showed that four years earlier he had sent the Director a letter marked "DEATH" and signed "Lord God, God of Israel." On 28 October 1958 he had hired a taxi in Richmond, picked up two hitchhikers and a 9-year-old boy, and tried to invade the Quantico Marine Corps School brandishing the boy's toy pistols.

The night of 21 February 1962 a man who thought he was a CIA agent telephoned four times trying to report to the Director. On 11 November 1962 the same man was arrested in Rapid City, S.D., after terrorizing residential areas of that city, firing dozens of shots through windows, and wounding one resident. When arrested he was carrying a high-powered rifle, a .22-caliber rifle, and a large quantity of ammunition.

One crank has been bombarding more than 50 top Government officials with details of alleged Communist electronic thought-control by "a coherent light process of inducing a state of controlled hypnosis by radiation of radio frequency energy on a wavelength of approximately 4×10^{-5} centimeters." The writer is officially diagnosed as a paranoiac schizophrenic, potentially dangerous.

On 12 December 1964 a 53-year-old Florida real estate salesman mailed the DCI a crude threat note ending "Your card is the ACE OF SPADES." This man had tried to see the Director in the past—once to discuss a proposed trip to Russia, again to report his invention of the hardest metal in the world. He is diagnosed as a chronic schizophrenic paranoiac with "delusions of grandeur, seclusiveness, and hostility" who should be kept in a "structured and supervised setting." He was arrested three times in 1964, once for carrying a concealed weapon. Earlier he had been arrested for armed robbery and in 1960 in Arlington, Va., for attempted murder.

In 1962, with the arrival of a new DCI, CIA informally reviewed protective measures with Secret Service and Metropolitan Police Department officers. It was reaffirmed that, while the threat of an attack on top Agency officials was unpredictable and might never

Dec 12, 1964

To McCone

Were you ever a marine?

You lied ~~my~~ country of
Forty Four Million Dollars –
In War Time.

YOU ARE A TRAITOR.

Remember the ~~f~~ Famous words –

I am a Berliner.

WHAT ARE YOU ???

The Marine Corps Builds Men - Body - Mind - Spirit

My name is Joe – not Oswald.
your card is the ACE of SPADES.

materialize, it was nevertheless real enough to require professional protection. Events since then have underlined this view, although there has been no (knock on wood) actual injury. Probably the closest call was when a woman wrestler traced one top official to the home of relatives and lunged at him with a bouquet of roses which was afterwards found to hide a jagged broken beer bottle.

In any intelligence agency it is important to keep track of crank contacts, not only to improve protection but also to assure continuity of control and analysis. Centralization of records in CIA's Office of Security permits quick identification of phonies and time-wasters. Professional security officers know how to handle the off-beat approach, and others would do well to rely on the professionals when they receive an irrational letter or find themselves face to face with an apparently unbalanced stranger.